

THE SNARE OF OFFENCE:

**Matt 24:10 “And then many will be offended,
will betray one another and hate one another”**

GOALS: Give Biblical understanding about the prevalence of offences amongst believers
Each participant to examine their own lives for hidden offences, face these honestly and decide what to do about them.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Jesus warned in Matt 24: 10 - 13 that in the last times, many would be offended, betray one another and hate one another. Not just a few - but MANY. The love of many will grow cold. Who are these people? The non-believers? The church? The word used for love here is Agape so it refers to the believers. Many believers will become offended in the last days.

For the faith of the disciples the biggest challenge in Luke 17: 1 - 5 was not so they could do more miracles, but the simple act of forgiving their brethren. Offences are bound to come, according to Jesus. We cannot live life without them. They are the cause of more problems than almost any other sin which haunts the church/ groups of believers. Offences also cause major problems in the individual spiritual lives of the children of God creating a wall between them and the Lord's presence and work in their lives.

1.1. DEFINITIONS: An offense is a reaction to the words/behaviour of another person which is in some way not acceptable, or hurtful to us. According to the dictionary it is an illegal act (perhaps only in the mind of the one who is offended!); a breach of a law or rule; resentment or hurt.

A **snare**, is something hidden to catch an animal in a trap. To be effective it must be hidden and baited. Satan lays his snares in deadly and deceptive ways, and one of the most frequently used snares is that of offence.

People who are offended can be spotted by the hurt, anger, resentment, jealousy, strife, bitterness, hatred and envy their lives manifest. Their lives are marked by insults, attacks, wounding, division, separation, broken relationships, betrayal and backsliding. This situation has become so common, that many believe it is a normal way of life!

As we start, **let us pray** that our Father will reveal, by His Spirit the hidden areas of our hearts. Let us welcome the conviction of the Holy Spirit so we can see ourselves as He does and use His grace to be set free from any snares in our lives which hinder our relationship with Him and our usefulness in His service.

1.2 CATEGORIES OF THE OFFENDED:

Offended people can be divided into two categories:

1.2.1. Those who **have** been treated unjustly

1.2.2. Those who **believe** they have been treated unjustly

The latter often draw their conclusions from wrong information, or their information is correct, but they make a distorted conclusion. They are hurting and so their understanding becomes darkened, as they judge by assumption, appearance and hear-say.

The enemy keeps the person in this offended state by keeping the offence hidden, cloaked with pride, which stops the person from admitting their true condition.



We get hurt by what someone says/does. If we are asked : “Aren’t you hurt?” we reply “No I’m fine, I’m not hurt” Because **we know it is wrong to be offended**, we suppress and deny our feelings. As a result:

- a. pride masks the true condition of our heart;
- b. pride distorts our vision. As long as we think we are fine, we will never change, our hearts are hardened and we are kept from the truth and a change of heart through repentance. 2 Tim 2:24 - 26
- c. pride makes us view ourselves as victims “I was mistreated and misjudged therefore my behaviour is justified.” Because we think we are innocent and falsely accused, we hold back forgiveness towards the person.

This process takes time. Often we are unaware that an offense had taken root in our lives. The root of bitterness is hardly noticed while it develops, but if it is nursed, it will grow. Do not be afraid to allow the Holy Spirit to reveal any un-forgiveness or bitterness. The longer we hide it the stronger it grows, and the harder our heart will become. We can stay tenderhearted by forgiving.
Eph 4:31-32.

Although we may convince ourselves that we are not hurt or offended, in fact we are. The true condition of our heart may be hidden from us, but NOT from God. We do not have the right to hold onto an offence because we have been mistreated. Two wrongs do not make a right.

1.3. APPLICATION:

To which of the two categories of the offended do you think you belong:

- a) Those who have been unjustly treated?
- b) Those who believe they have been unjustly treated?

If the latter, was this due to:

- a) wrong information, impressions?
- b) distorted conclusions from correct information?

2. OFFENDED AT GOD:

2.1. WHY DO WE BECOME OFFENDED AT GOD?

2.1.1. We Think He Must Be Angry with Us: When we don’t like the difficult situations He allows in our lives, we think He must be angry with us. How can we become offended at God? Because we know He does not make mistakes, we do not admit that we are offended at Him, hiding the true feelings and thoughts of our hearts. As Almighty God, He could have changed the hard circumstance, or prevented them from happening, so we conclude that He must be angry with us or want to punish us when He allows hurt, pain, misunderstanding, or other negative experiences to happen to us.

2.1.2. People became too familiar with Him: When Jesus was on earth, many became offended at Him and His teaching. Matt 13:56. In his home town they were offended because they knew Him and could not believe He could be someone so special and do miracles. Familiarity with Him made them become offended. When we think we know all God’s ways perfectly and He does/allows something we did not anticipate, we get offended - He does not fit what we think we know about Him.

2.1.3.Unbelief: We filter everything that happens through past hurts, rejections, or other negative experiences, so we find it impossible to believe God. We cannot believe that He means what He says, we doubt His goodness and faithfulness, judge Him by the standards of humans. However He is God - not a man. He cannot lie. Numb. 23:19 and His ways are higher than ours. Is 55:8,9

2.1.4. Bad treatment by others allowed by God. Many people after serving the Lord fervently, have come into difficult life situations because of being mistreated by either wicked men or carnal Christians. They have been treated unjustly, so become offended, which only fulfills the enemy's purpose of getting them out of the will of God. They become offended at God because He allows this to happen. If they stay free from offence, they will stay in God's will. If they become offended they will be ensnared by the devil and be taken captive to fulfil his will and purpose.

2.2. HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND? The choice is ours.

2.2.1 Know that the Lord knew it would happen: We need to be convinced that nothing can happen to us without the Lord knowing about it long before it happens. He is never surprised by what happens to us! God has already seen every adverse circumstance into which we will come and he has prepared the way of escape. 1 Cor 10:13. Often the thing that looks like an abortion of God's plan ends up being the road to its fulfilment if we stay in obedience and free from offence. By not becoming offended, we resist the devil.

2.2.2. We need to know God's character: One way in which the enemy draws us away from trusting God is by perverting our perception of His character. In Gen 3:1 he twisted God's command and distorted His character, making it appear that He was withholding something good from Adam and Eve. When Eve believed the enemy's lie, God's Word was no longer life to her, but it became law and so sin was aroused and she succumbed to the temptation.

2.2.3. We need to trust that God will never harm us. The enemy often uses the image we have of our earthly fathers, to distort our image of God. When we know that God will never do anything to harm or destroy us and that whatever He gives into our life is in our best interests, then we can give ourselves freely to Him and gladly lay down our lives for Him.

2.2.4. Know that we do not belong to ourselves. If we have given ourselves totally to Jesus and are committed to His care, we cannot be offended at Him, because we are not our own.

2.2.5 Come to Jesus because of Who He is. Those who are hurt and disappointed by the dealings of God, are those who have come to Jesus because of what **He can do for them, not because of Who He is.** This attitude, results in our becoming offended easily, self-centeredness makes us short-sighted, so we cannot see our immediate circumstances through the eyes of faith. We judge things by our natural surroundings and circumstances, do not see through the eyes of the Spirit.

2.2.6 Know that His ways and timing are perfect: Often God does not answer our prayers in the way or time-frame we feel is necessary. However, in retrospect we can see that in every case His wisdom and timing were perfect. Heb. 11:35 - 39 records those who trusted God even though they never saw the fulfilment of their promises from God. They could not be offended!

2.3. APPLICATION:

Mention an incident in your own life, where you were tempted to become offended at God. How did you respond to this?

3. OFFENDED AT OTHERS /BROTHERS/SISTERS:

We can be offended at:

3.1. FELLOW-BELIEVERS: Ps 55:12 - 14 those with whom we go to church, or to whom we listen (preachers)

3.2. THOSE WHO ARE CLOSE TO US and whom we care about. Therefore we expect more from them because we have given more of ourselves to them. Most people look out for themselves 2 Tim 3:2. They love themselves and easily become wounded hurt, bitter with others.

3.3. THOSE FROM WHOM WE DO NOT EXPECT IT, so are unprepared. We do not expect this kind of behaviour from fellow-believers, or those who are close to us, but Jesus said that it is impossible to live in this world and not become offended.

THEREFORE WE MUST BE PREPARED AND ARMED FOR OFFENCES BECAUSE OUR RESPONSE DETERMINES OUR FUTURE.

3.4. THOSE FOR WHOM OUR LOVE (AGAPE) HAS GROWN COLD

Matt 24:10 - 13 Agape loves in spite of the behaviour of the other person. We need to have faith in the love of God and if we sow love, we will reap the same. Gal 6:7-9. If we sow fleshly reactions, we will reap the same. If we sow Agape love in the Spirit, believing that the Lord will give us the right harvest, we will reap that. So we need to love even those who are our enemies Matt 5:44 - 47

We may not reap from the same person to whom we are sowing the love - they may continue to reject our love. It is not failure when the love is not returned from that person, so we don't have to expect it, but we can love unconditionally with Agape love. Mostly we walk in selfish love, so when our expectations are not met we are offended. We set ourselves up for offence when we require certain behaviour from those with whom we have a relationship. The more we expect, the greater the potential for offence. Prov. 18:19

3.5. APPLICATION:

Mention at least one incident where you have become offended at:

1. A fellow-believer or preacher
2. Someone close to you
3. Someone from whom you did not expect it
4. Someone for whom your love had grown cold

4. BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN GENUINELY MISTREATED:

4.1. REJECTION/MISTREATMENT BY BROTHERS:

Example of Joseph: Gen 37 - 48 and Gen 50: 19 - 20

- ☹️ Despised by his older brothers because his father favoured him
- ☹️ Had two dreams and told them to his brothers
- ☹️ They hated him even more
- ☹️ They tried to kill him but Judah intervened so he was sold to the Ishmaelites
- ☹️ This meant that he was betrayed by his own brothers.
 - * They took away his inheritance and family,
 - * blotting out his name,
 - * stripping him of his identity.
 - * Everything that was familiar to him was gone and
 - * he would remain a slave till he died.
 - * If he married, his wife and children would also be slaves.
- ☹️ He thought he would never see his father again or see his dream fulfilled.
- ☹️ Served Potiphar for 10 years, no news from his family, knew that his father thought he was dead.
- ☹️ Things began to look better, he had favour with Potiphar, but then the wife started trying to seduce him
- ☹️ Then into Pharaoh's prison - a sunken pit void of warmth and light.
People were mostly left there to rot as they survived on bread and water of affliction 1 Kings 22:27 According to Ps. 105: 18 his feet was hurt with fetters and he was laid in irons. He was put into this prison to die.
- ☹️ Imagine his thoughts:
 - * The more I try to do right, the worse it gets.
 - * How could God allow this?
 - * Could my brothers steal my promise from God too?
 - * Why hasn't this mighty, covenant God intervened on my behalf?
 - * How does this show that a loving faithful God cares for his servants?
 - * What have I done to deserve this? I only believed I heard from God?
- ☹️ Would he become bitter against his brothers and God? Give up all hope of the fulfilment of the promise given to him and be robbed of the last incentive to live?
His brothers were instruments in the Hand of God. Would Joseph hold fast to the promise, seeking God for its fulfilment? The bottom line was his brothers - they were the ones who had sold him. Perhaps he had thoughts of getting even once he got into power in fulfilment of the dreams? How different it would have been if his brothers had not aborted his future?

We fall into the same trap of blaming others:

- ± "If it was not for my wife, I would be in the ministry"
- ± "If not for my parents, I would live a normal life"
- ± "If my mom and dad had not been divorced, I would have had a better life".
- ± "If my pastor did not stop me from expressing my gifts, I would be free and unhindered in ministry"
- ± "If that woman in the church had not gossiped about me, I would still be in favour with the leaders. She has destroyed me and any hope I have of being respected."

You KNOW that your disappointment and hurt are their fault. ***However, absolutely no man, woman, child or demon can ever get you out of the will of God. No one but God, holds your destiny.***

Joseph's brothers deliberately wanted to destroy him; it was not accidental, they deliberately planned so there was no chance that he would ever succeed.

How would we react if we were treated like Joseph? "When I get out of here, I will kill them!" If he had that attitude, he would have killed 10 of the heads of the tribes of Israel, including Judah from whom Christ would be born. As Joseph stayed free from offence, the plan of God was established in his life and the lives of his brothers and the nation of Israel.

- ± Prison was a time of sifting for Joseph, but also a time of opportunity.
 - ± He could interpret the dreams of the baker and butler of Pharaoh.
 - ☹ The promise of the butler to speak for him when he got out, was forgotten and he was left in prison another two years.
 - ± Then Pharaoh had his alarming dream.
 - 😊 This was Joseph's opportunity and God's plan was being fulfilled.
 - ± Later his brothers came to Egypt to buy food, and he could have thrown them into prison or even killed them and not be blamed because he was 2nd in command in Egypt.
 - ± He gave them grain free and later allowed his family to settle in the best part of Egypt.
 - ☹ He rewarded them good for evil! (Matt 5:44)
 - 😊 In Gen 45:5 - 8 Joseph recognises that God had sent him to Egypt - not his brothers!
- Ps 105: 16.17

If we lay hold of the truth that no demon or mortal can overrule the plan of God for our life, we will be free. The only person who can get us out of the will of God is our self!

4.2. REJECTED/MISTREATED BY "FATHERS"/LEADERS:

It is one thing to experience rejection from brothers, but entirely another to experience it from a father - not only a biological father, but any leader God puts over us.

Those who work closely with leaders, often become offended by their leader, they see their flaws, they believe their mission is to deliver others from an unfair leader. They win the hearts of the disgruntled and ignorant and before they know it they end up splitting the church or ministry. Sometimes their observations are correct. Perhaps the person is doing wrong? Who is the judge? - you or the Lord? If you sow strife, you will reap it.

Example of David. 1 Sam 16 - 31 Ch 24:11

- 😊 Saul was tormented by an evil spirit because he had disobeyed God.
- 😊 David was found to play his harp in order to relieve Saul's torment.
- 😊 Then Goliath was defeated and David became the king's son-in-law.
- 😊 David had already been anointed king, so must have thought he was well on the way to getting into the palace and getting ready to become king.
- 😊 Saul became a father to David.

Then everything changed.

- 😞 The women were singing praises to David, more than to Saul and he became jealous and started hating and pursuing David.
- 😞 David must have thought: "What is happening?" "The promise was unfolding, now it is shattered. The man who was my mentor is trying to kill me. Saul is God's anointed and with him against me, what can I do? What chance do I have, Why is God allowing this?"
- 😞 He no longer lived in the palace, but in a damp cave,
- 😞 His bride was given to another.
- 😞 He knew the loneliness of a man without a country.

God, not the devil, placed David under Saul's care. Why would God allow this? Why was favour dangled in front of David's eyes only to have it taken away? Here was a great opportunity for David to be offended with God or with Saul. There were many unanswered questions, so the temptation was great to question God's wisdom and plan and blame Saul.

- ± Saul became desperate in his determination to kill David, hunted him from place to place.

- ± He even killed 85 innocent priests and wiped out the entire city of Nob - he was a murderer.
- ± How could God have placed His Spirit on such a man?
- ± How could he be the Lord's anointed?
- ± Then David's first opportunity came to kill Saul - 1 Sam 24:1 - 12. Even when Saul was trying to kill him, David did not take revenge, he still hoped that Saul would change.

Many leaders today are like Saul:

- * They fail in their task and calling.
- * Instead of taking a personal interest in the ones they are mentoring, they are more concerned with the goals than with the people.
- * They see the people only as resources to serve their vision, instead of seeing the vision as a vehicle to serve the people.
- * So there are many shattered lives, and wounded people. Justice, mercy, integrity and love are compromised for success.
- * Decisions are made based on money, numbers and results.
- * Many times leaders cut off those under them because they are suspicious. This is because they are not serving God, but their own vision.
- * They are insecure in their calling which breeds jealousy and pride.
- * They use the godly people as long as it benefits them.

Those who suffer rejection under such leaders:

- ± are easily tempted to be offended. God wants to do in them what He did in David who was concerned that Saul should not think he was rebellious. 2 Sam 24:11
- ± They take all the blame on themselves. Just like David. Then they try to prove their innocence to their leaders, thinking that if they can only show love and loyalty they will be accepted.
- ± David hoped that after this Saul's heart towards him would have changed. However, only a short while later Saul started hunting David again. David must have been devastated - he knew then that it was no misunderstanding, but Saul was intentionally, deliberately, without any provocation, seeking his life.
- ± Then his second chance came to kill Saul.
 - ☺ God had put the army to sleep, and David and Abishai went right up to the sleeping king and could have finished him off. 1 Sam 26:8
 - ☺ Abishai felt there was good reason for David to kill Saul:
He had murdered all those priests and their families
He was out with an army of 3000 to kill David - if you don't kill him first, he will get you. This is self-defence.
 - ☺ Abishai knew that David had been anointed king
God had put the whole army to sleep! Surely this was God's plan? Why would God do this? All the reasons sounded good and made sense and David was getting encouragement from another brother.

If David had been the least bit offended, he would have killed Saul, but he says 1 Sam 26:9 - 11 "Don't touch him, he is the Lord's anointed."

Even for the sake of the nation, who were like a flock of sheep without a shepherd, David did not act against Saul. Saul was the "wolf" robbing them for his own selfish purposes. David made this choice even if he knew that the only thing Saul wanted was to see him dead.

4.3. HOW CAN GOD USE CORRUPT LEADERS?

See the childhood of Samuel. 1 Sam 2 - 5.

1. God, not the devil placed the young boy under Eli and his corrupt sons.
2. Eli was so insensitive to the things of the Spirit that he thought a praying woman (Hanna) was drunk.

3. He was so fleshly that he was grossly overweight, and
4. so compromising that he did nothing about his sons, who were committing fornication with the women who came to church.

Samuel however, ministered to the Lord. 1 Sam 3:1 The corruption took its toll and God brought Eli and his sons down. Samuel did not try to find another place to worship or try to expose Eli and his sons. God was the One Who placed Samuel there and Samuel was not responsible for the behaviour of Eli and his sons. He knew Eli was God's servant, not his. **God was quite capable of dealing with His own servants.** Children do not correct a father.

5. JESUS AND OFFENSE:

JESUS DID NOT COMPROMISE TRUTH, IN ORDER NOT TO OFFEND PEOPLE:

1 Pet. 2:6 - 8. Believing and being disobedient are placed as opposites. The main element of believing is obedience. It is not difficult to obey when you know the character and love of the one to whom you are submitting. Love is the bottom-line of our relationship with the Lord, not love of principles or teaching, but love for the Person of Jesus Christ. If that love is not firmly in place, we will be easily offended.

5.1. JESUS CAUSED OFFENSE:

The same Jesus Who is often pictured as a good shepherd carrying the lambs in His Arms, also rebuked the Pharisees strongly. Matt 23:33. John 2:13 - 22; Luke 9:59,60

5.1.1. Jesus offended the Pharisees: He confronted and offended these leaders, and because they were offended they sent Him to the cross. Jesus loved them enough to confront them with the truth. Mat 15:7 - 9. Vs 12 the disciples asked Him whether He knew that the Pharisees were offended. To this Jesus replied that the plants which His Father had not planted would be uprooted Matt 15:13,14 Jesus showed that offenses will actually purge those who are not truly planted by His Father. People who get upset when truth is preached may leave - but they should be allowed to go. If the pastor continues to mourn over those who leave, refuses to preach the truth or confront people, he will find that the anointing of the Lord runs dry in his life.

5.1.2. Jesus offended those in His own home town: Matt 13:55 - 57. They were offended at him because they knew him so well. He did not compromise truth in order not to offend them

5.1.3. Jesus offended His own family members: Mark 3:21 - 31-35 They thought He was out of His mind, John 7:5 says His brothers did not believe Him. He was rejected by those close to Him but He was not seeking the acceptance of His household. He would fulfil His Father's plan whether they approved or not. We cannot compromise what God tells us, in order to please our family members.

5.1.4. Jesus offended His own staff: John 6:60 - 61, 66. Many of the disciples did not walk with Him any longer because they were offended by His words. The only thing that mattered to Jesus was fulfilling the Father's plan.

5.1.5. Jesus offended some of His closest friends: John 11:1 - 3,6 When Jesus

delayed to go to Mary and Martha when He was told that Lazarus was ill, they were likely a little offended - it seemed that Jesus didn't care. Many are afraid that if they don't fulfil the expectations of their people they will hurt their feelings and lose their support. They are trapped by the fear of offending others.

5.1.6. Jesus offended John the Baptist: Luke 7:18 - 20. Why did John ask Jesus if He was the One Who was coming? He had been the one to announce that Jesus was the Lamb of God John 1:29, that He was the One Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit 1:33. John had suffered much, lived sparsely, fasted often, fought the Pharisees, not been married to fulfill His calling. Now he was locked up in prison, few people come to visit him, news about the ministry of Jesus comes to Him. The longer he stays in prison, the stronger the temptation grows to become offended. "I have spent my life for this man, and he does not even come and visit me in prison!" If He is the Messiah, why doesn't He get me out of here?"

Jesus' reply: Luke 7:21 - 23..... "blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." "Do not be offended because I do not operate in the way you expect."

Even if we are trained in God's ways, like John was, we can still be offended with Jesus. His ways are higher than ours.

If we are going to obey the Spirit of God, people will be offended by us. When we live for the will of God, we will not fulfill the desires of men. As a result we will suffer in the flesh. Jesus suffered His greatest opposition from the religious leaders. If anyone challenges the truth of the Gospel, it is time to be offensive without apology. We must determine in our hearts that we will obey the Spirit of God no matter what the cost.

5.2. JESUS NEVER CAUSED AN OFFENSE IN ORDER TO ASSERT HIS OWN RIGHTS:

In order not to offend (although as Son, He did not have to pay the tax, to the temple, which was His Father's property) he made Simon get the money from the fish' mouth to pay their temple tax. God provided the tax money! He did not have to work for it because He was the Son. Yet He still chose to pay the tax, so as not to offend. He came to serve. As Son He was free, owed no-one anything, was subject to no man. Yet He chose to use His liberty and freedom to serve. Another word for liberty is privilege. We are not to use our privilege as children of the Living God to serve ourselves. There is freedom in serving, but bondage in slavery.

1 Cor 8:4, 6-7. Those of stronger faith were eating meat of questionable origins in front of weaker saints. They were more concerned with holding onto their rights than with offending their brethren. So they placed a stumbling block in the way of their weaker brothers. Rom 14: 13,17. Their knowledge caused them to stand on their "rights" and so offend a weaker brother. Knowledge without love, destroys. 1 Cor 8: 11,12.

We need to learn to lay down our rights. All of Matt 18 is about offenses. Jesus says that whatever causes sin, needs to be removed.

5.3. WHEN JESUS OFFENDED PEOPLE, HE DID SO AS A RESULT OF OBEYING THE FATHER, NEVER BY DEMANDING HIS OWN RIGHTS.

Our liberty should not become a stumbling block to those who are weak. 1 Cor. 8:9.

5.4. APPLICATION:

Discuss with a partner how we can cause offence to others, by not being willing to compromise.

Where do we draw the line between offending because we stand on the truth, and seeking not to cause offence to a weaker believer?
Give some practical examples.

6. RESULTS OF OFFENCE:

6.1. OFFENCE BRINGS CAPTIVITY: Luke 17:1 Greek word skandalon = laying a trap in someone's way. Offense is a tool of the enemy to bring people into captivity. 2 Tim 2:24 - 26 Those who are in quarrels or opposition are captured by the devil to do his will and they are unaware of their captivity. When someone is deceived they believe they are right, even though they are not. We become captives of the one with whom we have been offended, and also captives of the enemy.

6.2. BEING DECEIVED BY FALSE PROPHETS. Matt 7:15. Those who are offended because their love has grown cold, are an easy prey for the deceptions of the enemy. The wolves like to be around the sheep - in the congregation as well as in the pulpit. They should be identified by their lives, not their teaching.
A minister or a Christian, is what he lives, not what he teaches.

6.3. HAVE A FORM OF GODLINESS 2 Tim 3: 1 - 5, 7; 4:3-4.
Unforgiving people have a form of godliness, but deny the power of it to change their lives from being unforgiving to forgiving. They may claim to be "born again" but are deceived. They may have much knowledge, ever be learning, but have not really come to know the truth. If you are offended and in unforgiveness and refuse to repent of this sin, you have not come to the knowledge of the truth.

6.4. THERE IS A PROGRESSION:
OFFENCE ± BETRAYAL ± HATRED. Matt 24:10
When we betray we seek our own protection or benefit at the expense of others. Having built walls to protect ourselves makes us capable of betraying others. The closer the relationship the more severe the betrayal. This then leads to hatred and 1 John 3:15 says that no one who hates his brother has eternal life abiding in him. We see Christians going to court against one another, rather than obeying 1 Cor 6:7 and Matt 5:44 and Phil 2:3. Jesus gave us the example: 1 Pet 2:21- 23.

6.5. WE USE WALLS TO ISOLATE OURSELVES FROM OTHERS:
Strong cities had walls around them. When we are hurt we build walls around ourselves to protect our hearts from further wounding. We become selective, keeping out those we fear may hurt us. We keep out those we think owe us something (an apology) and open our lives only to those whom we think are on our side. Yet, even these can offend us so our walls create a prison. We are not only afraid to let others in, but terrified "to go out" ourselves.
The focus of an offended Christian is inward and introspective, guarding their rights and relationships carefully. We consume our energy making sure we will not be hurt again. Unconditional love (agape) gives others the right to hurt us.

6.6. ALL RELATIONSHIPS ARE AFFECTED:
Once we retain an offence in our hearts, we filter everything through it. How we view our past relations is the scope for the future ones. If we leave a church or

relationship resentful and embittered, we will enter the next church or relationship with that same attitude. 60 - 65% of divorced people, end up getting divorced again after re-marrying. The un-forgiveness they have against their first spouse, hinders their future for the second one. They also have the added fear of being hurt. This principle can apply to all relationships.

It is impossible to establish a healthy relationship with a person who has left another relationship bitter and offended. Healing must first take place. Love forgets wrongs so there is hope for the future.. If we have truly overcome an offence, we earnestly seek to make peace. Jesus desires to heal our wounds, but often we do not let Him do so this because it is not an easy road to take. It is a path of humility and self-denial that leads to healing and spiritual maturity. It is the road that leads to life.

6.7. SPIRITUAL VAGABONDS ARE BORN:

When David had the opportunity to kill Saul, God was testing his heart. God had put the army to sleep 1 Sam 26: 7 - 12 but His reason was to test David's heart. God wanted to see if David would establish his throne in righteousness.

Rom 12:19

**It is righteous for God to avenge His own elect,
but unrighteous for His servants to avenge themselves.**

God tests His servants with obedience. He deliberately places us in situations where the standards of religion and society would seem to justify our actions. We may even think it would be noble and protect others by avenging ourselves. This is not God's way, but the world's, earthly, and fleshly. When thinking of exposing the leader over him, the author struggled with the thoughts "I'm only reporting truth. If I don't, how will this ever end?" Today he knows that the Lord gave him that information only to test him. Was he going to become like the man who wanted to destroy him or would he allow for God's judgement or mercy if the man repented?

Many leave the church/ organisation because they are critical of the pastor/leaders and so become vagabonds, drifting from one church/ fellowship to another. Only the Lord should be the One to tell us when we should leave. If we are where the Lord wants us, the devil will try to get us out. He wants to uproot people from where God has planted them. If we don't budge, even in the midst of great conflict, we will spoil his plans.

Transplanting from one place to another we do not flourish. Ps. 92:13. We cannot keep pulling up a tree after planting it. It has to stay, endure the winds and storms so that it will send down roots. So we may be trying to resist the very things the Lord is sending to refine us. Spiritual growth comes when we delight in the law of God:

1. Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord...Ps. 1 - 1-2
2. Great peace have they who love thy law.. for nothing shall offend them.
Ps 119:165
3. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth fruit.
Ps. 1:3

This means that a believer who chooses to delight in the law of the Lord in a time of trial will not become offended and be like a tree with deep roots where the Spirit provides nourishment. He will draw from the well of God deep within his

spirit and will mature to the place where adversity become a catalyst for fruitfulness.

In Mark 4:16 - 17 Jesus said that the seed sown on stony ground, hears and receives the word, but because they have no root in themselves, when affliction or persecution comes for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

Once we leave the place where God has planted us, our root system begins to shrink and we will have no strength for the times of adversity or hardship. We become spiritual vagabonds, suspicious and afraid that others will mistreat us, crippled and hindered in our ability to produce true spiritual fruit, struggling in a self-centred life, eating the remains of the fruit of others.

6.8. WE LOOSE THE ABILITY TO RECEIVE FROM THE ONE AGAINST WHOM WE HOLD AN OFFENCE.

When we get close to the leader, we can begin to see his flaws and become critical and judgmental. Offence sets in and we sense no inspiration or anointing on the preacher any longer. Then we start talking to others, whom we may find are feeling the same and so we add fuel to the fire Prov. 26:20. Then we may then leave the church/organisation without knowing that God has led us out. As a result we will not be a help or blessing in any church/group. Offended people react to the situation and do things that appear to be right, even if they are not inspired by God. We are called to act, not react

6.9. WE FORFEIT GOD'S FORGIVENESS FOR OUR SINS.

Mark 11: 24 - 26. If we do not forgive, neither will our Father forgive us. Jesus meant what He said. We live in a culture where we do not always mean what we say, so people do not take what we say seriously. A parent tells a child. "If you do that again, I will spank you". The child not only does it once, but several times after that and does not get spanked. Or if he is punished it is either less severe or overly severe because the parent is then irritated. The child then learns that not everything an adult says is true, so becomes confused whether he should take authority figures seriously. By the time he becomes an adult, he accepts this as normal. His conversations consists of promises and statements in which he says things he does not mean.

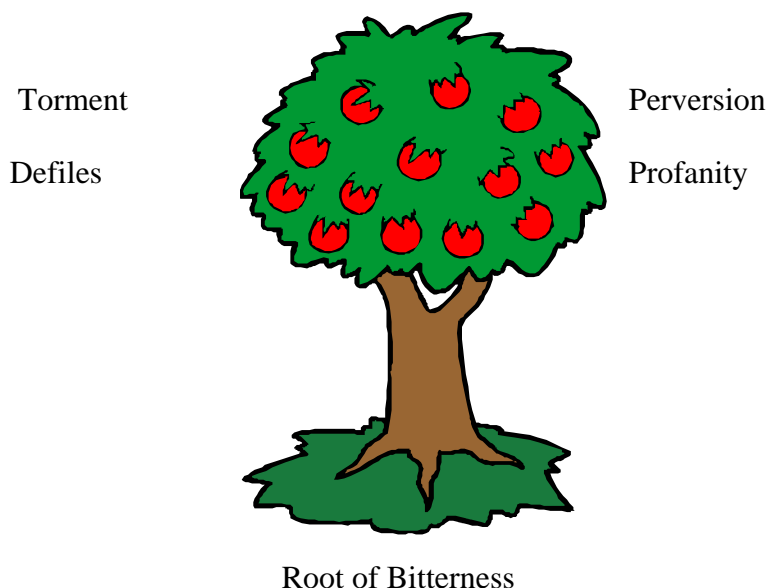
Example: We meet someone unexpectedly while hurrying to go somewhere. So greet them, saying it is good to see them (when actually we thought 'O No, I don't have time to talk to him now!') So we quickly finish the conversation by saying "We should get together for dinner some time" While we have no intention of doing this! It was only a way to "get rid" of the person quickly. People today don't mean a quarter of what they say. So we have difficulty knowing whether they mean what they say and whether we can take them at their word. However, when God speaks, He always means what He says! Matt 6:14,15; Luke 6:37; Matt 6:12 says God forgives like we do. If we don't, He doesn't forgive us either. Truth does not change. Matt 18: 15 - 35 about the unforgiving servant. He was forgiven the equivalent of about US\$4.5 Billion. His fellow servant owed him about US\$4000. That was a lot of money, but nothing compared to what he had been released from. So the unforgiving servant was forced to repay the original unpayable debt. That is our original sin - how can we repay that? It is impossible. We may then fall into the category of Matt 7:22,23 If we love God, but refuse to forgive a brother we are called liars. 1 John 4:20. God the Father will do this to any believer who refuses to forgive from the heart, no matter how great the offense.

6.10. WE ENTER INTO TORMENT, SENT BY GOD. Matt 18 :34,35

People cannot receive deliverance, release, comfort because they are under the evil spirits who are torturing them, which have been given permission by God to do so. Sometimes they deny themselves forgiveness. Matt 5:24 includes our self.

Heb 12:15-17: When we have a root of bitterness in our hearts, there are serious consequences:

- causes torment(to yourself)
- defiles many (infects others)
- sexual sin (perversion)
- profanity (turn away from God)



The devil will outwit you 2 Cor 2:10,11; Eph 4:26,27

Physical affliction - disease Ps 32: 1-5; Ps 38:3 - 8

6.11. WE PLAN TO TAKE REVENGE/ GET EVEN:

Rom 12:17 It is unrighteous for us as children of God to avenge ourselves. That is what we are seeking when we refuse to forgive. We desire, seek, plan and carry out revenge. When we seek to correct the wrong done to us, we are setting ourselves up as judges. James 4: 12; 5:9 tells us we are not to judge one another.

25. In the Old testament there was room for repaying evil with evil. Lev. 24:19; Ex. 21:23 -

Matt 5:38 - 42 says we are not to resist an evil person, turn the other cheek, let him take your cloak as well as your tunic, go the extra mile. Our attitude is to be so far removed from avenging ourselves, that we are willing to open ourselves to be taken advantage of again.

We must make room for the Just Judge. He rewards and avenges in righteousness. Sometimes we forgive, but we still expect them to 'repay' in some way. Perhaps to ask forgiveness or apologize, or admit that they had been wrong and we were right. But we are to forgive as Jesus did. Col 3:13; Eph 4:32.

The condition of the heart is often compared by Jesus to soil. Soil only produces what we plant in it. If we plant the seeds of debt, unforgiveness and offense, the root of bitterness will spring up. Bitterness is unfulfilled revenge. Heb. 12: 14,15

Example of Absalom: 2 Sam 13 - 18

- ☹️ His sister Tamar was defiled by Amnon, and
- ☹️ although Absalom waited for more than a year for David to deal with the matter, Amnon was never punished by David.
- ☹️ After two years Absalom took revenge, killed Amnon and had to escape to Geshur.
- ☹️ But the offense he carried against his father grew stronger.
- ☹️ He became an expert critic of David's weaknesses: "My father is honoured by the people, but they are blind to his true nature; He is worse than king Saul, he committed adultery and murdered one of his most loyal servants; that is why he did not punish Amnon. He covers all this up by pretending to worship God."
- ☹️ His hatred of Amnon, 2 Sam 13:22, resulted in murder. Then because of his critical attitude he drew others to himself who were dissatisfied/ discontented.
- ☹️ Finally he hatched a conspiracy against his father and was killed, although David had ordered him to be spared.
- ☹️ He was killed by his own bitterness and offense. He refused to release the debt he thought his father owed and ended up defiled.

6.12. APPLICATION:

Which of the results of offence can you identify in your own life?

List them and then decide what you are going to do about it.

7. GOD'S PURPOSE IN ALLOWING TESTS/TRIALS THROUGH OFFENSES:

7.1. TRIALS AND TESTS SHOW WHERE WE ARE SPIRITUALLY AND REVEAL THE TRUE CONDITION OF OUR HEARTS. How I react under pressure is how *the real me* reacts. The storms reveal the foundation of the house. Matt 7:24 - 27. If we build our lives on the Word of God (obeying it) the storms cannot bring them down. We may have a beautiful 5 -storey house, decorated with the latest materials, but if the foundation is not sure, it will not stand the storms of life. The plain one-storey house built upon a rock (invisible as it is the foundation) will stand whereas the other will fall. We need to hear and follow the revealed Word of God to us. It is useless to do and say things just because everyone else is saying or doing them. We need only do those things that He illuminates in our hearts.

7.2. THEY SHAKE ALL THAT CAN BE SHAKEN. Heb. 12:26 - 27 .

7.2.1. REVEAL WHERE WE PLACE OUR CONFIDENCE:

The word "sift" means to "sift, shake in a sieve fig. by inward agitation, to try one's faith to the verge of overthrow."

PETER: In Matt 16:16,17 Peter had passed the first test when he affirmed

who Jesus was. Then there was a further test. Jesus said someone would betray Him. Luke 22:21,22 Jesus did not pray that Simon would be saved from the test, but that his faith would not fail. The enemy's plan was to destroy Peter, but God's plan was to shake everything in him that needed to be shaken. Any thought process or heart attitude that is rooted in selfishness or pride, will be purged. As a result of this tremendous shaking all of Peter's self-confidence would be gone, and all that would remain would be God's sure foundation. He would no longer function independently, but would be deeply dependent on the Lord. His statement "I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death" was not born of the Spirit, but from his own self-confidence.



Just after Jesus told them He would be betrayed, they were arguing over who was the greatest. How easily Jesus could have become offended at them! Most likely it was Peter who initiated the discussion, He probably reminded the others that he had walked on the water, had his experience with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, been the first to have the revelation about who Jesus was. He was fairly confident that he was the greatest of the twelve, but this **confidence was not rooted in love but in pride**. So Jesus gave them the standard of the Kingdom. Luke 22: 25 - 27. Although Peter had received the revelation about Who Jesus was, he was not yet walking in the character and humility of Jesus. He was building on a strong will and personal confidence. Pride would not enable him to fulfil his destiny in the Lord, but would destroy him. So Jesus allowed him to be tested. Luke 22:31 - by Satan.

7.2.2. THINGS THAT BRING ABOUT THE SHAKING: Often it is not the big things that bring the shaking, but the small ones. Peter was not a coward, he was ready to cut off the ear of the of the high priest's servant in a garden full of soldiers John 18:10, but in front of a small servant girl, he became a coward. In spite of everything being shaken, Peter had a revelation of who Jesus was and so his faith stood the test. By contrast Judas, although he walked with Jesus for 3 years, never had a revelation of Who Jesus was, so when the shaking came, his lack of foundation was revealed, and he committed suicide.

7.2.3. REVEAL WHY WE BELIEVE IN JESUS: Many who "say the sinner's prayer" attend church, become active, study their Bibles do so without a revelation of who Jesus really is though they confess Him with their mouths. When severe disappointment comes, they are offended. "God never did anything for me" "I tried Christianity, but my life only became more miserable" "I prayed and asked God to do this and He did not do it" They served Jesus for what He could give them, so were easily offended. Mark 4:16-17 They have no root in themselves and immediately are offended.

Example of young man, fervent for the Lord, deep in prayer, serving the Lord. Then his father died and soon afterwards his best friend was killed in an accident and a month later he came across an accident, where everyone in both cars were close friends of his. Two of them died in his arms while he was trying to help them. Then he became angry with God. Why had He allowed this? He was consumed with frustration, God has failed him in his greatest hour of need. "Lord I have served You and given up many things to follow you. Now You have abandoned me!" He believed God owed him something for all he had given up to

serve Him. He believed God should take into consideration all he had done for Him. He was serving Him for the wrong reasons. He stopped going to church, ran around with the wrong crowd, avoided any contact with God. After two weeks he was deeply convicted, but it took another six months before he even dared to approach the Lord and then it seemed heaven was brass. It took more than a year before his spiritual life was restored and the Lord had taught him many things about his character that he never knew were there. He had been a man without character, depending on himself (as he was raised to be like that) a self-made man. He was grieved deeply, not because he was running around drinking, but because he had turned his back on the Holy Spirit. He experienced a lot of shaking in his life, self-confidence was removed, he was now building on the grace of God.

7.2.4. REVEAL THE HIDDEN WEAKNESSES: Offenses will reveal the breaking points in our lives. **Often where we think we are strong there is a place of hidden weakness.** It will remain hidden until a powerful storm blows away the cover. It is easy to say that we can do nothing from our own ability, but to have this truth deeply rooted in our being is another matter.

7.3. TRIALS ARE GOD'S REFINING PROCESS. They are like the heat which separates the impurities like un-forgiveness, strife, bitterness, anger, envy from the gold. Where there is no heat of trials and afflictions, sin can hide easily, but in the heat of the trials the impurities surface so they can be skimmed off the top and our lives can become like pure gold. The imperfections in our characters come out during the heat of the trials. Often God's plan causes us to face hurts and attitudes we don't want to face. We run from the very thing that will bring strength to our lives. Refusing to deal with the offence will not free us from the problem, but will give us only temporary relief. The root of the problem remains untouched.

7.4. REVEAL THE THINGS WE ARE TRYING TO HIDE: As long as we blame others, trying to remove the splint out of our brother's eyes while the log is still in ours, we will never repent. The trials of offences show up the things we are trying to hide and this revelation of truth brings us to freedom. We should not let pride keep us from seeing reality and repenting.

7.5. TO BRING US TO MATURITY:

There are two words for sons of God in the New Testament: teknon and huioi. Tekon = one who is a son merely by reason of birth Rom 5:15,16. The Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are children (teknon) of God

Huioi = One who can be recognized as a son because he displays the character/ characteristics of the father. Rom 8:14 - as many as are led by the spirit, these are the sons (huioi) of God. This refers to mature sons.

How do we get from teknon, to huioi? **Through obedience to God in times of trial.** 1 Pet 4:1 He who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. Such a person ceases to follow his own ways, he chooses God's ways, he has become a perfectly obedient child of God. We learn obedience through the difficult circumstances we experience. Knowledge of Scripture is not enough - we must obey. 2 Tim 3:7 talks about those who are ever learning, but never come to the

knowledge of the truth. This is because they do not apply it. We may learn, but we will never mature because we do not obey.

One reason why we do not obey, is because **of self-preservation** which comes as a result of offence. While hiding behind a false fence of self-protection we do not face our own character flaws, but blame others, so God's attempts to mature us are spoiled. In an attempt to escape the opposition, we leave the source of offence and become a spiritual vagabond.

Sometimes God will allow a person to run from the situation He wants them to face, because they are set in their hearts to run from it. Elijah ran from Jezebel 1 Kings 18 - 19 although God wanted him to confront her. He was in no condition to fulfil the assignment, so God allowed him to run away for a while. At the mount Horeb, God asked him: "What are you doing here?" - a strange question when the Lord gave him the food for the journey, allowing him to go. God knew that Elijah was set to escape a difficult situation, so he allowed that although it was not His original plan. Later He sent him back with some help after anointing Elisha 1 Kings 19:15. Under Elisha and Jehu's ministries, Jezebel was destroyed 2 Kings 9 - 10.

7.6. APPLICATION:

Can you identify the purpose of God in a trial of offence which you have experienced recently, or are still experiencing?

How does this change your perspective about the trial?

8. DEALING WITH OFFENSES:

8.1. STAY TENDER TOWARDS GOD, FORGIVE AND REFUSE TO GET OFFENDED, knowing that God has allowed the circumstances to be what they are.

Rev. 3:18 - God wants us to get pure gold from Him - soft and pliable. Gold that has been purified in the fire, all the alloys have been removed, so it is soft and pliable. A pure heart is like pure gold and the pure in heart shall "see God" Matt 5:8;

Heb. 3:13 talks about the hardening of the heart through sin. We become insensitive to God, tenderness towards Him is lost, it becomes hard to hear His voice, we cannot see accurately spiritually and so set ourselves up for deception.

Do we have a heart like David's? We may not seek to kill with a physical sword, but the tongue which can be fiercer than a sword. Prov. 18:21 Churches split, families divide, marriages shatter, love dies, through the harsh words spoken against one another. Even though our facts may be correct, our motives are impure. Prov. 6:16 - 19 says that to sow discord amongst brethren is an abomination to the Lord.

8.1.1. WHY WE SHOULD FORGIVE:

* Christians are commanded to forgive and to be reconciled to one another



- Matt 5:23,24; Mark 11:25; Luke 17:3-5
- * Our forgiveness is prerequisite for God's forgiveness Matt 6:14,15
- * Forgiveness is an act of the will Luke 23:34
- * Forgiveness is an attitude Eph 4:32; Matt 18:21,22
- * Forgive as Christ forgave Col 3:13; Jer 31:34
- * What makes it hard to forgive? (hurt, anger, injustice, rejection =feelings)

8.1.2. PRACTICAL STEPS TO FORGIVING:

- ± Choose to forgive as an act of obedience to God
- ± In prayer:
 - thank God that He has forgiven you
 - Ask Him for His love to operate through you
 - Thank Him for good things in that person, and blessings you have received through him/her
 - Ask God to bless that person (pray positively) Matt 5:44; Ps 35:13,14
- ± Handle **feelings** of hurt:
 - Each time the incident comes up in your mind, forgive again
 - Refuse recurring thoughts, Phil 4:8
 - Receive emotional healing through the Cross Is 53:4,5; Ps 147:3
 - Allow the feelings to surface, face them, give them to the Lord in prayer and accept His healing.
- Do not raise the issue again. To others = gossip;
to the person = accuse;
to yourself =brood. Is.43:25
- Prove forgiveness by attitude and actions
- ± Learn to forget. Heb 8:12

8.1.3. DEALING WITH THE OFFENDER:

(Dealing with conflict situations)

- ± Trust God to solve the problem. He is on the side of unity John 17:21
- ± Forgive the person for not acting or reacting the way I wanted/expected Matt 6:14,15; 18:21-35
- Remember:** Forgiveness is an act of the will in obedience to God's command Eph 4:31,32. I am not say "You are right"
- ± Start with myself:
 - Where am I wrong? Matt 7:1-5
 - What does the Lord want **me** to do? Matt 5:23,24
 - Are my attitudes right?
 - Humility - 1 Pet 5:5
 - Meekness - 1 Pet 2:21-23
 - Patience - Jam 1:4
 - Forbearance - we are living in a world full of imperfect people
 - Willingness to risk confrontation - pay now or pay later? Matt 5:9 Peace-keeper?
 - Move for reconciliation - before the sun goes down. Matt 5:23,24; 18:15 It is always **my** move first.



— Matt 5:23,24 —>



Offender	Offended
Not important who is right or wrong, we should meet halfway!	
ask forgiveness for my share of the wrong	
express forgiveness to the other person. If they ask forgiveness, don't say "It does not matter" - because it does! Say: "I forgive you"	
Pray together, each asking forgiveness for their wrong	
accept forgiveness from God and one another	
recognise that the issue may not be resolved eg difference of opinion - but relationship can be restored. Rom 12:18	
Celebrate the reconciliation because:	
→ God has been glorified Rom 15:5,6	
→ Love has been demonstrated 1 Cor 13:4-7	
→ Healing and growth has taken place 2 Thess 1:3	

8.2. BE ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE.

Eph. 3:16 - 18. Our love for God is the foundation. We cannot lay down our lives for someone we do not trust. John 15:13 So we cannot lay down our lives for God, unless we know Him well enough to trust Him. We must know the nature and character of God, have the assurance that He loves us unconditionally and will never do anything to harm us. What may look like a disappointment to us will always turn out for our good if we trust His love and do not lose faith. God is love, there is no selfishness or evil in Him. Satan is out to destroy us. We view our lives through short-range glasses, distorting the true picture. God looks at the eternal aspect of what we experience. By taking the short-term view we get easily offended either with the Lord or one of His servants, and then we easily are deceived by the enemy.

The love of God for us/others and love for God is the key to freedom from the baited snare of offense, an abounding love, growing continually and strengthening our hearts. It lays down its life selflessly, even for the good of an enemy. When we walk in this kind of love we cannot be seduced into taking the bait of Satan.

8.3. HUMBLE OURSELVES, empty ourselves of natural confidence, realize our own weakness, that we cannot live from our own strength.

After Simon Peter betrayed the Lord he could no longer boast of being great. He lost all natural confidence, saw that his own strong will was useless. He was only a candidate for God's grace after he had been humbled. Humility is a prerequisite to receive God's grace. Trials in this life will expose our hearts - whether we have offense towards God or towards others. Tests either make us bitter towards God and others, or they make us stronger. If we pass the test our roots will go down deeper and we will be stabilized for the future. If we fail, become offended it can lead to defilement and bitterness.

8.4. TAKE CARE OF OUR HEART ATTITUDES:

8.4.1. In Matt 5:21 - 24 Jesus compares the Law which talks about outward actions, to the law which regulates our inner heart attitudes. In God's

eyes a murderer is not only one who physically commits murder, but also the one who hates his brother. **What we are in the heart, is what we really are.** Here Jesus illustrates the severity of holding anger or bitter offense. To call a brother 'raka' is the same as saying he is godless. For today's language it would be the same as saying 'go to hell' and meaning it. Jesus tells that not dealing with anger can lead to hatred and that, if not dealt with, can put them in danger of hell.

- 8.4.2. It is more important for us to help a stumbling brother, than to prove ourselves correct. Maybe the person we have offended, believes we are unjust in our treatment of him, when in reality we did him no harm. He may have inaccurate information which yielded an inaccurate conclusion. Or he may have accurate information from which he has drawn an inaccurate conclusion. What we said may have been grossly distorted through the various channels of communication. Our intent was not harm, but our words and actions gave a different appearance.

Often we judge ourselves by our intentions, but everyone else by their actions. It is possible to intend one thing, while communicating something totally different and even our true motives could be hidden from us. We may believe they are pure, but when filtered through the word of God, we see them differently.

- 8.4.3. We may have sinned against the person. We were angry, or under pressure and he got the brunt of it. Maybe the person has constantly and deliberately lashed out at us and we were responding in the same way. Whatever happened, this person's understanding is darkened, he has based his judgement on assumptions, hearsay, appearances, deceiving himself even though he believes he has discerned our true motives. How can we have accurate judgement without accurate information? We must be sensitive to the fact that he believes with his whole heart that he has been wronged. For whatever reason he feels this way, we must be willing to humble ourselves and apologize. **Jesus encourages us to be reconciled, even if the offense is not our fault.** It takes maturity to walk in humility in order to bring reconciliation. The first step is harder on the one who is hurting, so we have to 'go to him' See above

8.5. HOW TO DEAL WITH THE FAULTS OF A LEADER/FATHER

Does God want to use me to expose my leader's faults? The pastor may be destroying the people and the church, be dishonest, immoral, and we have all the facts. Yet, the Lord knows whether we want to avenge ourselves (what are our true motives?) more than protect the ministry. The information could be accurate but motives may be impure. The Lord will insist that we go to the person and humble ourselves, asking forgiveness for being critical and judgmental.

Testimony of the author, how the person, who was previously attacking him stopped doing this. Later the wrong the person had done was exposed to the senior pastor, but not because of his doing. What the other person was doing was much worse than what he knew, so he was fired immediately. Judgement came, but not at his hand. But when it came, he grieved for the man and his family. Like David, when he got the news that Saul had died, he grieved over him. 2 Sam 1: 17 - 27. He did not celebrate, but called the whole nation to grieve over him. We can only do that when we have truly forgiven and through humility and refusing to avenge ourselves, we are free from the prison of offence.

David even went further, he did good to Saul's remaining family and showed them kindness. 2 Sam 9: 1 - 13.

8.6. APPLICATION:

How did you deal with offenses in the past?

Where did you fail in dealing with offenses?

List the persons **who have offended you**, specially leaders and decide what you will do to be reconciled

9. ESCAPING THE SNARE OF OFFENSE:

It takes effort to stay free from offense. Paul compares it to exercising. Sometimes it is easy to forgive, because we have exercised our hearts so they are in a condition to forgive. Like trained muscles can take the strain of exercise. Some offenses will be more challenging than those for which we have been trained. This may cause a wound or injury after which we will need to exercise spiritually to be free and healed again. How do we deal with the more severe, extreme cases of offense? Sometimes we deny that we are hurt because we know we ought to forgive. Then we cannot be helped.

9.1. RECOGNISE THAT WE ARE HURT. Often our pride does not allow us to admit that we are hurt and offended. Once we admit it, the Lord can help us to overcome. Be willing to face the pain of the offence, so as to enter into freedom.

9.2. FORGIVING THE PERSON is the next step, but we may not be aware of the extent of the wound. In our heart we have forgiven but we are still vulnerable and can be hurt again. Just like with physical injury, I need to exercise, to strengthen my heart, mind and emotions to prevent future injuries. (See above 8.1.2.) Forgiveness is an ongoing process.

9.3. ALLOW THE LORD TO CONTINUE THE HEALING PROCESS
Ps. 147:3; Is. 61:1 Often the incidents which were hurtful have to surface and be forgiven one at a time as they happened and caused pain, one at a time. The healing can be complete when we see the person again. We may still have to fight the urge to be critical but we need to go to the person to be reconciled. Once this happens we have entered into mature love which covers a multitude of sins. 1 Pet. 4:8.

9.4. WHAT ABOUT RELAPSES? After starting on the way to recovery there can be the same thoughts as before the forgiveness. It is necessary to reject these thoughts as soon as they occur. 2 Cor. 10:5. (See above 8.1.2.) and choose again and again to forgive.

9.5. BECOMING MATURE IN RELATIONSHIPS:
When we first get to know a person, we love them because they can do no wrong in our eyes. When we get hurt it is hard to love - it takes every bit of faith we can muster. Once we have gone through the restoration process and have been healed, we can love the person as at the start, in spite of their faults. It is easy to love those who can do no wrong in our eyes. That is like honeymoon love. It is another thing to love a person when we can see their faults, and have been their victim. The love of God matures and strengthens our hearts. When we meet similar cases after that, we can easily let go of the offense - because our heart has been strengthened through exercise.

We mature through hardships. Growth comes in tough times and we cannot escape the hard places which the Lord allows during our journey with Him as they are part of the process of becoming perfect in Him. Choosing to run from the problems will seriously hinder our growth. As we overcome we become more compassionate, and fall more in love with Jesus. If, after a hard experience, we do not feel like that, it is likely that we have not yet overcome the offense. Recovery from offense is our choice and some get hurt and never recover. It may sound cruel, but it is their choice.

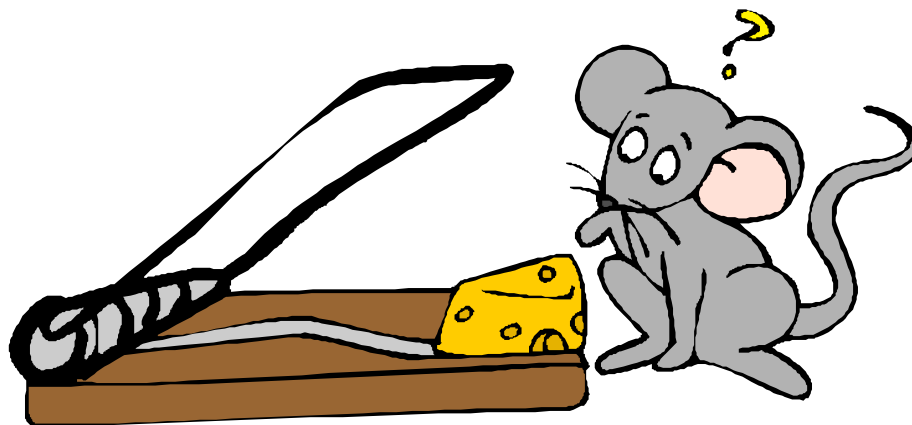
Maturity does not come easily or we would all attain it. The resistance is because the course of our society is not godly, but selfish and the world is controlled by the prince of the power of the air. Eph. 2:2. We were never promised a life of ease in this world. If we are rowing against the current on a river, you need to keep on rowing, or you will drift down stream. The trials will show the answer to one main question: Are we going to look out for our self, or live a life of self denial. 1 Pet 4:12-13

When we lose our life for Christ's sake, we truly find it.

THE TRUE TEST OF CHRISTIAN MATURITY IS HOW WE RELATE TO OTHERS

9.6. APPLICATION

1. Check through the steps of escaping the snare of offense. Which of these have you omitted? How can you correct this?
2. List those **who are offended with you**
3. What steps do you need to take to be reconciled?
4. Write down what you will do and when you will do it.



DON'T TAKE THE BAIT AGAIN!

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HCFI Lectures: Interpersonal Relationships.

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